

October 16, 2007

Administration's Withholding of Information Relating to Corruption in Iraq

Key Points:

- Today, the House will consider, under suspension of the rules, H.Res. 734, which raises objections to the Administration's withholding of information relating to corruption in Iraq.
- The American people and Congress deserve honest answers about the extent of corruption in the Iraqi government and whether corruption is fueling the insurgency and endangering our troops.
- There is growing evidence that Iraqi corruption is an enormous problem that must be dealt with. For example, at an October 4th hearing of the Oversight and Government Reform Committee:

-- Stuart Bowen, the Special Inspector General for Iraq Reconstruction, testified that the "rising tide of corruption in Iraq" is "a second insurgency" that "stymies the construction and maintenance of Iraq's infrastructure, deprives people of goods and services, reduces confidence in public institutions, and potentially aids insurgent groups reportedly funded by graft derived from oil smuggling or embezzlement."

-- David Walker, the Comptroller General of the United States, testified that "widespread corruption undermines efforts to develop the government's capacity by robbing it of needed resources, some of which are used to fund the insurgency."

-- Judge Radhi Hamza al-Radhi, the former Commissioner of the Iraqi Commission on Public Integrity, testified that "corruption in Iraq today is rampant across the government, costing tens of billions of dollars, and has infected virtually every agency and ministry, including some of the most powerful officials in Iraq."

- And yet the Administration appears determined to withhold vital information from the American people and Congress on corruption in Iraq. This withholding of information undermines our ability to work together to eliminate this source of support for the insurgency and enhance our chances of success in Iraq.
- In response to this resolution being on the House Floor today, David Satterfield, the State Department's Iraq policy coordinator, had a conference call with reporters yesterday where he admitted that official corruption in Iraq is "real, endemic, and pernicious." However, the State Department continues to refuse to share with Congress and the American people key information about corruption in Iraq.

- On September 25, the State Department issued a directive, instructing officials not to answer questions in an open setting that asked for “broad statements/assessments which judge or characterize ...the ability/determination of the Iraqi government to deal with corruption, including allegations that investigations were thwarted/stifled for political reasons.”
- As a result, on October 4, at the hearing of the Oversight and Government Reform Committee, Lawrence Butler, Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs, refused to answer several questions regarding the efforts of the Iraqi government to root out corruption.
- Furthermore, the State Department has retroactively classified portions of a Government Accountability Report report entitled “Stabilizing and Rebuilding Iraq,” which addresses the commitment of the Iraqi government to enforce anticorruption laws. It has also retroactively classified two reports on corruption in Iraq prepared by the Office of Accountability and Transparency in the U.S. Embassy in Iraq.

What This House Resolution Does:

H.Res. 734 states that it is the sense of the House of Representatives that:

- It is essential that Congress and the people of the United States know the extent of corruption in the Iraqi government and whether corruption is fueling the insurgency and endangering members of the United States Armed Forces.
- It was wrong to retroactively classify portions of the Government Accountability Office report entitled “Stabilizing and Rebuilding Iraq” and other statements that are embarrassing but do not meet the criteria for classification.
- It is an abuse of the classification process to withhold from Congress and the people of the United States broad assessments of the extent of corruption in the Iraqi government.
- The State Department’s directive that prohibits Federal Government officials from providing the American people and Congress broad assessments relating to Iraqi corruption should be rescinded.

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